Metropolitan Hilarion gives interview to Serbian newspaper Politika

In an interview in the Serbian newspaper Politika *published on 31 August 2011 with the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk questions of inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian relations, the topic of the Church's witness to the contemporary world and the situation in the region of Kosovo were touched upon.*

How do you envisage the resolution of problems in relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the government of Montenegro?

The role of Orthodoxy in the life of Montenegrin society has always been great. Today Montenegro is an independent state; eighty percent of its inhabitants confess Orthodoxy.

Montenegrin Orthodoxy has close spiritual ties to the historical Patriarchate of Peć, within which it was represented by the Zeta metropolia. Now it comprises an important part of the Patriarchate of Serbia, the canonical territory of which covers several independent countries. We may say the same of the majority of the Patriarchates: Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Moscow. The Patriarchate of Alexandria, in particular, covers the entire continent of Africa.

It is clear that the problems which have accumulated in church-state relations in the country ought to be resolved in the course of a tolerant, attentive and respectful dialogue of the authorities of the Montenegrin state with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The resolution of these problems is unthinkable without serious attention being paid to the canonical foundations of the Orthodox Church which go back many centuries and reflect her spiritual nature and correspond to her lofty vocation. At the same time, the canonical order of the Orthodox Church has sufficient flexibility and allows us, where good will permits, to find compromise solutions to these most acute problems.

During recent meetings with representatives of the state authorities of Montenegro I heard more than once that the decision to create a single Montenegrin Orthodox Church does not presuppose

interference into canonical questions. However, we ought to realize that genuine success in realizing this type of reform can be attained only by taking into account the opinion of the Patriarchate of Serbia, in whose competence there are historically to be found the questions of the church life of Orthodox Christians on the territory of Montenegro.

After your visit to Serbia at the beginning of April of this year the Serbian press wrote that during the meetings that took place you expressed the negative attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church to the possible invitation of the Pope to Serbia in 2013. Did you discuss this question with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church?

During meetings with the hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church this topic was deliberately not discussed. It is the internal affair of the Patriarchate of Serbia. As far as I know from the media, among the bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church there isn't a unanimous opinion regarding the invitation of the Pope.

So far the nature of the forthcoming celebrations of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan is not yet clear – whether they are intended to be testimony to the significance of this historical jubilee for representatives of various Christian confessions or as a way of expressing the fraternal unity of the Local Orthodox Churches.

The danger that Europe is losing its Christian character has been repeatedly emphasized by both Orthodox and Catholic Church representatives. You have emphasized that the Orthodox together with the Catholics ought to come to the defense of traditional Christian values in Europe. In what way can the two Christian Churches fulfill this task jointly and do you believe that this co-operation can have damaging effects for one of the two Churches, as it is feared in certain church circles which perceive this dialogue as a means of Unia?

Recently, it has become ever more evident that Orthodox and Catholics must co-operate in the cause of defending traditional Christian values in modern secular society. The position of our Churches is close on the many topics with which the world today challenges Christianity – these are the processes of liberal secularization, globalization, the blurring of family values and the undermining of traditional morality. Our Churches together speak out against abortion, euthanasia, and medico-biological experiments incompatible with the moral principle of respect for the human person, and so on.

The problem of Christianophobia – the denigration of Christians' human rights because of their religious adherence – is becoming ever more relevant. Unfortunately, we can see the manifestation of an openly antireligious position in contemporary Europe where certain political forces are trying to push religion from public life into the sphere of individual life. Here the agreed position of the two Churches can have

important meaning.

Orthodox-Catholic co-operation may develop in various forms. This may be joint cultural projects, public undertakings, action at the level of representations at international organizations. There are already positive examples of such co-operation. Thanks to the agreed and consistent actions of Orthodox and Catholics we have, for example, managed to obtain a positive decision in the European Court of Human Rights in the *Lautsi v. Italy* case regarding crucifixes in Italian state schools.

At the same time, fears that this type of co-operation can lead to Unia are completely unfounded. Unia is union on the basis of compromise in questions of faith. However, the co-operation of which I speak does not concern the realm of doctrine. The Orthodox and Catholic Churches, which are not in complete doctrinal and canonical unity, can interact in the sphere of social problems, in which the two Churches are close.

The fight for the survival of the Serbian Church in Kosovo has not come to a halt and its mission as before remains under threat. You mentioned the idea of sending monks from the Russian Orthodox Church to the monasteries of Kosovo and Metohija to strengthen the Orthodox presence in the region. What was the outcome of this idea?

This question is at the stage of being studied and its final resolution will be determined by the wishes and needs of our Serbian brethren. With the blessing of the Hierarchy of the Serbian Orthodox Church we are discussing possible aid to His Grace Bishop Theodosius of Raška and Prizren. We also positively evaluate the fact that Russia in the framework of participation in a UNESCO programme has given substantial financial aid for the restoration of Orthodox holy sites in the Kosovo region.

On 5 May 203 you were appointed by decision of the Holy Synod to be representative of the Russian Orthodox Church to European International Institutions in Brussels and occupied this position until 2009. How important is it for the Orthodox to have their representatives at these institutions and is this advantageous to the Russian Orthodox Church?

By the decision of the Holy Synod my work as representative of the Russian Orthodox Church to European International Institutions began as far back as July 2002 and continued right up until 2009 when I became head of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate. During this period the Representation worked actively with the institutions of the European Union on a wide spectrum of questions, participating in the discussion of problems that are of interest for European Christians. It was then that there came about the tradition of annual meetings of European religious leaders with EU leaders. These meetings became a productive form of dialogue of religious communities with the integration body allowing the interests of the faithful to be heard at a high political

level. Dialogue with the EU is one of the proofs of the importance of the Russian Orthodox Church's functioning abroad.

Regarding the content of church diplomatic work today, as it was centuries ago, its foundation is witness to the eternal Truth of Christ. The expression of this recognition in our day is the concern for the preservation of moral direction in international co-operation. This is especially important for dialogue with international organizations which are concerned with problems of human rights and inter-cultural dialogue. The Church, in offering ways towards resolving social problems, is rooted in the centuries-old tradition of mankind and the spiritual heritage of Europe which give to the human person and society on the whole convincing motivation for a virtuous life. For the majority of the peoples of Europe such motivation is unthinkable without the Christian faith, the ideal of which we bear witness to in out external church mission.

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